

# DEPARTURES

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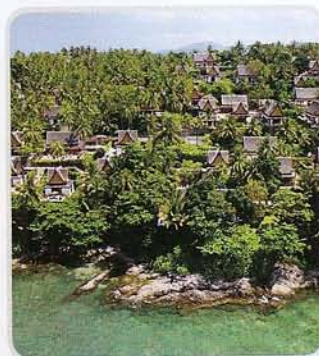


UPDATE

# Escape to Phuket

The best of what's happening on Thailand's largest—and most luxurious— island. **BY CATHERINE HEALD**

World-class hotels. Great diving and snorkeling. Lively nightlife. But what sets Phuket apart from other beach destinations are the cultural activities (including Buddhist temples and a pearl factory), not to mention some of the finest food, service and spas in the world—at lower prices than you'd find in the Caribbean or Europe. While there are more than 400 hotels on Phuket alone—some say it's overbuilt—that just means there's something for everyone. For an ultra-luxe vacation, a yacht cruise on (or a helicopter ride above) the Hockney-blue waters is essential, as is a room or villa with an ocean view and a private pool, of which there are many. Here's how the top five resorts in the region, which includes nearby Yao Noi and Krabi, compare. ■



## 1 AMANPURI

**LOCATION** Quiet peninsula not far from the action.  
**WHAT'S SPECIAL** Beach is about as private as it gets on Phuket; this is where celebs and jet-setters go; private-pool villas are best (and most expensive) in area.  
**HOWEVER** Most regular rooms have no full ocean views or private pools.  
**OUR FAVORITE THING** The impeccable, unsurpassed service.  
**BEST FOR** Families who want the very best without having to leave the premises.  
**TO BOOK** 📞 Rooms start at \$875; villas, \$3,000; Pansea Beach; 66-76/324-333; amanresorts.com.

## 2 ANDARA

**LOCATION** Busy beach area.  
**WHAT'S SPECIAL** Massive private villas with three to six bedrooms, personal housekeeper and chef.  
**HOWEVER** Entrance to beach itself is a bit of a hike.  
**OUR FAVORITE THING** The panoramic views from the villas high up on the hillside.  
**BEST FOR** Those who want to be in the middle of things.  
**TO BOOK** 📞 Rooms start at \$840; villas, \$2,850; 15 Moo 6, Kamala Beach; 66-76/338-777; andaraphuket.com.



## 3 PHULAY BAY (KRABI)

**LOCATION** Very quiet; a two-hour drive from Phuket and about an hour from Krabi's airport.  
**WHAT'S SPECIAL** It's secluded, but there are many activities nearby; huge 13-foot beds; Royal Beach Villas cover more than 6,000 square feet.  
**HOWEVER** Beach at low tide appears muddy.  
**OUR FAVORITE THING** The stunning views of limestone rock formations in the Andaman Sea.  
**BEST FOR** Couples seeking active holidays with rock-climbing, hiking and elephant-trekking.  
**TO BOOK** 📞 Villas start at \$475; 111 Moo 3, Nongthalay, Muang; 66-75/628-111; phulay-bay.com.

## 4 SIX SENSES YAO NOI

**LOCATION** Secluded; 45 minutes by boat from Phuket.  
**WHAT'S SPECIAL** Great boating and water sports.  
**HOWEVER** Rustic rooms conjure up *Robinson Crusoe*.  
**OUR FAVORITE THING** Hilltop restaurant The Reserve serves delicious, locally sourced organic food.  
**BEST FOR** Those seeking a holistic experience.  
**TO BOOK** 📞 Villas start at \$425; 56 Moo 5, Tambol Koh Yao Noi, Amphur Koh Yao; 66-76/418-500; sixsenses.com.



## 5 TRISARA

**LOCATION** Quiet bay, a short drive to lively areas and the airport.  
**WHAT'S SPECIAL** Gorgeous semiprivate beach; one of the best kids' clubs in Phuket.  
**HOWEVER** Entry-level rooms are tiny.  
**OUR FAVORITE THING** Every room—from entry-level to four-bedroom villa—comes with a private pool and an ocean view.  
**BEST FOR** Couples and families with children.  
**TO BOOK** 📞 Rooms start at \$695; villas, \$900; 60/1 Moo 6, Srisoonthorn Rd., Chergntalay; 66-76/310-100; trisara.com.